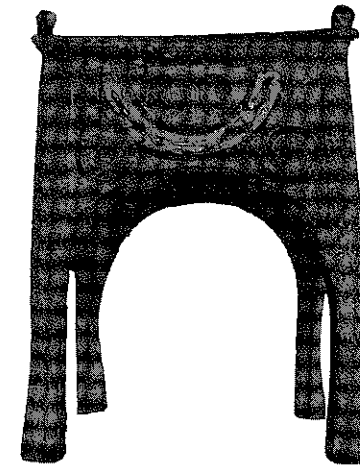


# Miniature Votive Offerings in the north-west Provinces of the Roman Empire

Philip Kiernan



  
MENTOR  
Studien zu Metallarbeiten und Toreutik der Antike

BAND 4

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Herausgegeben von Reinhard Stupperich und Richard Petrovsky

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*Cover illustration:* Various miniature objects. From the top left to bottom right, a coin impression and spear from Woodeaton (Ashmolean Museum); lead and gold wheels from Nanteuil-sur-Aisne (Musée des Ardennes), a bronze axe from Woodeaton, (BR61.iii, Ashmolean Museum), a bronze axe from Bern, Engelhalbinsel (SU10.ii, Historisches Museum Bern), two iron swords and a shield from Mouzon (Musée des Ardennes), a bronze saw and ladder from Cologne (Rheinlandes Museum Bonn). All objects are approximately 1:1.

*Titlepage:* A bronze stand with enamel decoration from Rheinzabern (Historisches Museum der Pfalz, Speyer).

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1-10</b>
1.1. Miniature and Model Votive Offerings	1
1.2. Defining Votive Offerings, Models and Miniature	1-2
1.3. The Place of Votive Models in the History of Votive Deposition in North-West Europe	3-6
1.4. Explaining Miniature and Model Votive Offerings	6-7
1.5. Chronological and Geographical Limits of the Study Area.	7-8
1.6. Methodology	9
1.7. Presentation of the Material	9-10
1.8. Note on Distribution	10
<b>2. Wheels</b>	<b>11-39</b>
2.1 Introduction	11-13
2.2 Wheels as Dress Ornaments and Wheels in Graves	13-16
2.3. Large Scale Finds of Model Wheels in Temples and Ritual Deposits	16-20
2.4. Individual or Notable Finds of Model Wheels	21-23
2.5. Metal Rings as Miniature Wheels?	23-26
2.6. Moulds, Metals and Production Techniques	26-27
2.7. Distribution and Dating	27-29
2.8 Interpretations of the Wheel Models	29-39
2.9. Summary and Conclusions on Model Wheels	39
<b>3. Arms and Armour</b>	<b>40-113</b>
3.1. The Dedication of Arms: Iron Age and Roman Traditions	40-41
3.2 The Salisbury Hoard Shields	42-46
3.3 The Sanctuary in the Bois du Flavie, near Mouzon	47-63
3.4. The Sanctuary at Blicquy, Hainaut, Belgium	63-66
3.5 Individual Finds of Miniature Swords and Shields	
3.6. Miniature Swords / Pocket Knives with Scabbards of Bone and Bronze	66-78 78-83
3.7. Shields and Swords with Suspension Rings	84-86
3.8. Studs, Badges, <i>Fibulae</i> and other Fittings in the Form of Arms and Armour	86-89 89-97
3.9. Miniature Spearheads	89-97
3.10. Complete Miniature Spears	97-104
3.11. Conclusions and Summary: Miniature Arms and Armour	105-113
<b>4. Axes</b>	<b>114-152</b>
4.1. Introduction	114-115
4.2. The History and Anatomy of Ancient Axes	115-118
4.3. Miniature Socketed Axes	118-119
4.4 Axe-shaped Dress Accessories	119-122
4.5 Miniature Votive Axes	122
4.6. A Typology of Miniature Axe	122-134
4.7. The Geographical Distribution of Axe Models	134-136
4.8. Sites with Miniature Axes	136-138
4.9. Chronology	138
4.10. Realism of the Miniature Axes	138-139

4.11. Inscriptions and Other Markings	139-143
4.12. Interpreting Miniature Axes	143-151
4.13. Conclusions on Miniature Axes	151-152
<b>5. Coins</b>	<b>153-164</b>
5.1. Introduction	153-154
5.2. Ceramic and Lead Jetons	154-157
5.3. Coin Impressions and Wax Coins	158-160
5.4. Plated Coins	160-163
5.5. The 'minimissimi.'	163-164
5.6. Conclusions on Model Coins	164
<b>6. Ceramic and Metal Vessels, Lamps, Tripods and Stands, Miniature Tableware</b>	<b>165-179</b>
6.1. Ceramic Vessels	165-168
6.2. Miniature Lamps	169
6.3. Miniature Cauldrons	169-173
6.4. Miniature Tripods	173
6.5. Miniature Enamelled Bronze Stands	173-175
6.6. Miniature Lead-Alloy Tableware	175-179
<b>7. Varia: Jewellery, Other Tools, Votives Relating to Travel</b>	<b>180-194</b>
7.1. Model Jewellery	180-181
7.2. Other Miniature and Model Tools	182-190
7.3. Model Objects Relating to Travel: Boats, Anchors, Feet	190-193
7.4. Conclusions, Other Models	193-194
<b>8. The so-called "Mithrassymbole"</b>	<b>195-210</b>
8.1. Introduction	195-196
8.2. Distribution and Findspots of the <i>Mithrassymbole</i> .	196-197
8.3. Characteristics of the Graves with <i>Mithrassymbole</i>	197-198
8.4. The Dating of Graves with <i>Mithrassymbole</i>	198-199
8.5. Description of the <i>Mithrassymbole</i>	199-203
8.6. Interpreting the <i>Mithrassymbole</i>	203-209
8.7. Conclusions on the <i>Mithrassymbole</i>	209-210
<b>9. Conclusion</b>	<b>211-218</b>
9.1. Miniatures and Models as a Heterogeneous Group	211-213
9.2. The Relationship between Miniature Grave Goods and Votives	213-214
9.3. Models as Reflections of Reality	214
9.4. The Identity of the Dedicator	215-216
9.5. Big Prayers and Little Gifts – What Did the Dedicators Want?	216-217
9.6. The Mechanisms of Change. Why Miniatures and Models?	217-218
9.7. Conclusion	218
<b>10. Appendix: Catalogue of Model Axes</b>	<b>219-267</b>
<b>11. Addendum</b>	<b>268-273</b>
<b>12. Abbreviations and Bibliography</b>	<b>274-294</b>
<b>13. Indices of Sites and Museums</b>	<b>295-300</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Miniature and Model Votive Offerings

The production of miniature or model objects for ritual purposes is a phenomenon that can be observed in practically all areas of classical archaeology. From the Minoan to Byzantine periods, artefacts can be found labelled as 'miniatures' and 'models' in excavation reports and museum catalogues. The Romano-Celtic world, where archaeology and artefact studies play a major role in our understanding of religious practices, is no exception. There is hardly a book written on the topic of Romano-Celtic temples or religion that does not devote some space to the significance of miniature votive offerings. A few articles have considered miniature objects from particular sites or areas, but no comprehensive study of the phenomenon of miniaturisation has ever been undertaken.<sup>1</sup> In general, there is an unwritten but nonetheless universal consensus that these artefacts formed a homogenous offering type in antiquity, and that they were all produced for the same or very similar reasons. More specifically, it is widely assumed that miniature votive offerings functioned as a special means by which ordinary people could approach, propitiate, and thank the divine powers with a minimal expenditure of personal resources. Those who could not afford to dedicate the real thing had the option of using a model as a substitute. Both of these assumptions will be challenged in this book, which considers the various finds usually described as miniature or model votive offerings separately, and evaluates their contribution to our understanding of Romano-Celtic religion.

## 1.2. Defining Votive Offerings, Models and Miniatures

There is surprisingly little dispute amongst archaeologists as to what constitutes a votive offering. The term can be found applied to virtually any artefact found in a ritual context, be it a sanctuary, a pit or a body of water. Votive offerings may be objects removed from the mundane world, such as weapons, coins and jewellery, or may have been produced specifically for dedication, such as terracotta figurines or stone altars. Miniatures and models clearly belong to this second category. A stricter definition might demand that all votive offerings be dedicated as part of the *solutio* of a vow (*votum*), and would separate them from objects dedicated casually for luck and at regular religious festivals. As the archaeological evidence does not often allow for such a distinction, the common practice of describing

<sup>1</sup> For instance: Webster 1986: 125-130; Henig 1984: 22, 59 and 148-149; Green 1976: 42-43, 1978: 32-33, and 1986a: 220-222; Bradley 1990: 184-187; Fauduet 1993: 117-118; Van Andringa 2002: 122; Derks 1998: 51; Müller 2002: 124-126; de la Bédoyère 2002: 116. Apart from the model weapons found at Mouzon (3.3), miniature votives of the north-west provinces are not mentioned in the new *Thesca* I.391-408 (2004, Bauchhenß).

anything that seems to have been ritually deposited as a 'votive offering' has been adopted here.<sup>2</sup>

The terms 'model' and 'miniature' are more problematic, and can be found applied to an astonishing variety of artefacts. Models are always reproductions of something else, but miniatures can either be things that are very small or small reproductions of larger objects. Thus a small bronze statuette of a deity might be described both as a miniature and a model. It is both a small object, and possibly a small reproduction of a larger cult statue. Nonetheless, the statuette is a different category of find than the sort of objects that are dealt with in this book, and few archaeologists would apply either term to it.

This problem of terminology has been recognised by Miranda Green, who presented the following definition: "The term 'model' or 'miniature' object may be taken to mean, in the main, miniature replicas of full-size Romano-British objects... all models are recognizable copies of potentially usable items."<sup>3</sup> Green's definition makes it clear that we are concerned with representations of real day-to-day objects (*realia*), and not representations of divinities, imaginary things, art works, people or parts of their anatomy. Thus the vast corpus of anatomical votive offerings fall outside the realm of this study, as do representations of divinities and animals, even though these artefacts may also have functioned as replacements for the things they represent. For example, a terracotta figurine of a god might have been dedicated instead of a larger stone sculpture, and a bronze animal figurine might have been used to replace or commemorate an actual animal sacrifice. But these objects are major find categories in their own right, and merit individual study. The present work is concerned only with representations of man-made things, not humans, animals or gods.

Two further points should be added to Green's definition. First, all model objects, like many other types of votive offering, must have no possible intrinsic and functional use of their own. Attachments and fittings on Roman furniture, pendants, and jewellery often reproduce daily objects on a miniature scale, but they served the practical and non-ritual function of decorative elements. True miniature votive offerings were produced for purely ritual purposes, though it will soon become evident that the critical question of functionality is often difficult to answer when dealing with specific artefacts. Second, the objects we are dealing with are sometimes 'models' rather than 'miniatures' in the strictest sense of the words. It is conceivable that a model object can be the same size or even larger than the objects they represent, but their crudity or material of manufacture renders them unusable. In short, it is chiefly subject matter (*realia*) and a lack of functionality, not size that define votive models.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of dedicated objects in archaeology in general see Osbourne 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Green 1981: 253.

### 1.3. The Place of Votive Models in the History of Votive Deposition in North-West Europe

In his study of pre-historic votive deposition in Western Europe from the Neolithic to the end of the Iron Age, Richard Bradley argued that the various patterns and trends emerging in different periods are all segments of a long and interrelated sequence, rather than separate free standing traditions.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, we must begin this study by considering the place that has been assigned to miniature offerings within that long sequence of votive deposition. Chronologically that place is at the very end of the Iron Age, and the early years of the Roman period.

A general picture of the development of votive deposition in temples from the late Iron Age to the early Roman period has can be drawn from the excavation of sites like Gournay-sur-Aronde (Oise), Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Somme), Blicquy (Hainaut), Martberg bei Pommern (Rheinland-Pfalz) and most recently Tintignac (Limousin).<sup>5</sup> A typical Iron Age sanctuary consisted of a rectangular ditch that marked out the sacred area of the temple (*temenos*) in the middle of which a central pit had been dug. The pit was sometimes covered by a simple timber structure, and the outside of the ditch was often surrounded by a wooden palisade. Both ditches and central pits were used as receptacles for votive offerings, consisting of vast quantities of animal and human bones, iron weapons, pieces of armour, horse gear and precious metals.<sup>6</sup> At Ribemont-sur-Ancre, an enormous platform composed of weapons and human remains was constructed inside the sacred enclosure.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary assemblages of similar objects are known from watery contexts, such as rivers and lakes, and other natural settings. The massive collection of metal work found in the Thièle river at the site of La Tène itself, or the finds at Llyn Cerrig Bach in Wales are prime examples of ritual deposition in watery contexts.<sup>8</sup> Swords and spearheads from such deposits are often bent and twisted, while shield bosses and helmets are found intentionally scratched and dented. In short, these offerings been ritually damaged before being handed over to the gods. The archaeological evidence corresponds strikingly well to the testimony of several ancient authors, who describe the sacrifice of prisoners and animals, as well as the dedication and public display of war booty in Celtic

<sup>4</sup> Bradley 1990: 155-156.

<sup>5</sup> On Gournay-sur-Aronde and Ribemont-sur-Ancre and see Brunaux 1986: 17-27 and 2000: 91-111. On the Martberg bei Pommern see Thoma 2006: 20-22 and on Hayling Island the spectacular finds recently unearthed at Tintignac were presented by Christophe Maniquet at the Roman Archaeology Conference 2005 in Birmingham and are described on-line at: <http://tintignac.asso.free.fr/>. (Accessed October 30<sup>th</sup> 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Van Andringa 2002: 94-99; Fauduet 1992a: 87-91; Derks 1998: 168-185.

<sup>7</sup> Brunaux 2000: 101-112; Cadoux 1984.

<sup>8</sup> Vouga 1923 and Fox 1945.